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TAGS: PREL ECON KWBG KPAL IS JO  
SUBJECT: SCENESETTER FOR SE MITCHELL'S SEPTEMBER 17 VISIT  
TO JORDAN

REF: A. AMMAN 2126  
B. AMMAN 2064  
C. AMMAN 1988 (NOTAL)

Classified By: Ambassador R. Stephen Beecroft  
for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (S/NF) Your visit comes as Jordanian officials and the King continue to eagerly anticipate the launch of negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians. Jordanian-Israeli relations are cordial, although the growing controversy over Mughrabi Gate remains a sore point. Many of our interlocutors anticipate the launch of a formal American plan for peace, and media commentators have started to wonder if our resolve or leverage is flagging. While King Abdullah remains focused on contributing to peace, Jordan's financial woes have shifted his regional priorities. Domestically, the ever-present debate about the political identity of Palestinian-origin Jordanians is bubbling to the surface again as the drive towards negotiations continues. End Summary.

#### Jordan-Israel Relations

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¶2. (S/NF) Relations between Jordan and Israel remain civil and constructive overall, although there are some issues which remain contentious. Israeli PM Netanyahu last visited the King in Aqaba in July -- a trip that Jordanian interlocutors painted as amiable. His policy advisor Uzi Arad paid a low-key visit to meet with Royal Court Chief Nasser Lozi and FM Nasser Judeh on August 31.

¶3. (C) Jerusalem continues to be a primary focus of Jordanian concern in the run-up to negotiations. The King and his government see the necessity of stopping demolitions and evictions in Jerusalem, and believe that only a settlement freeze which includes Jerusalem will be credible in the Arab world. In addition, reconstruction of the Mughrabi Gate ascent to the Haram Al-Sharif/Temple Mount remains a source of irritation (Ref A). Israel has announced its intention to move forward with its own design for the site despite Jordanian objections and desires to submit an alternate proposal. While Jordanian officials have told us that they do not want Mughrabi Gate to become a distraction in the run-up to negotiations, they continue to harp on the issue in bilateral talks and international fora such as UNESCO. We continue to press for a bilateral resolution to the dispute, despite Jordan's efforts to enlist our support.

#### Anticipation Of A Plan

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¶4. (C) Jordanian officialdom and the political elite eagerly anticipate the release of an official American plan for peace in the Middle East. The FM and others have been saying in press statements for months that the launch of a plan is imminent, creating expectations that have so far gone unfulfilled. Media commentators remain relatively optimistic

about the process as it has progressed so far, but several have started to wonder if our efforts have stalled. Editorials continue to focus on the issue of settlements as the primary barrier to negotiations, with many opining that the quest for deliverables from Arab states is not being met with movement on the Israeli side.

¶ 15. (S/NF) The King and his government have repeatedly told us that they fear negative consequences if negotiations are launched without Syrian participation. The King visited Syria on September 16, and may have some new perspectives to share on this angle. There is also concern in Jordan that the United States will not be assertive enough in the conduct of negotiations. They worry that allowing third countries to host a conference to launch the negotiations will not produce results, and have been urging us to enlist the President to both host the conference and play a direct role in negotiations.

#### King Abdullah Passes The Hat

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¶ 16. (C) In the face of a growing budget deficit, the King has once again been making the rounds among regional allies (Ref B). Since his return to public visibility following a lengthy summer vacation, the King has visited Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Libya, the UAE, and Syria on both fundraising and policy missions. As receipts from international donors drop, Jordan recently turned to the World Bank for a bridge loan to cover a gap in the budget. Despite the King's efforts to collect donations which will allow the government to pay civil servants and the military as well as distribute monthly

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national assistance allotments in advance of the Eid holiday, the word around Amman is that no bonuses are forthcoming.

#### Indicators Of Domestic Instability

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¶ 17. (S/NF) Small but noticeable cracks in the veneer of Jordanian stability began to appear during the King's long summer vacations in Aqaba, the American West, and the French Riviera. The first major strike in over 20 years took place in the port of Aqaba, the summer session of parliament was dissolved prematurely in the face of political opposition to government policies, a closely watched soccer game was halted due to anti-regime chants, four top generals were dismissed as part of an unscheduled purge of over 230 military officials, the Ministry of Interior publicly acknowledged a policy of revoking citizenship documents from certain Palestinians, and the King made a harsh statement against domestic "rumormongers" (Ref C). Increasing tension between Jordan's East Banker and Palestinian populations underlies many of these events. Ambiguity in the move toward a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has some worried about resulting changes in Jordan's political system which will upset the status quo by giving Jordanians of Palestinian origin a larger role in national political debates. Background chatter about a possible cabinet reshuffle has also started to increase as a result.

Beecroft